

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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O 121453Z SEP 78
FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 2206
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA IMMEDIATE
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AMEMBASSY MANAGUA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY MEXICO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE
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S E C R E T SAN JOSE 3867

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3
TAGS: PINT, NU, CS
SUBJ: POSSIBLE GOCR INTEREST IN OAS BORDER OBSERVERS

REF: STATE 229639

1. IN RESPONSE PARA 2 REFTEL, WITHOUT CONSULTING GOCR DIRECTLY, IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT REACTION TO ANY OAS BORDER PRESENCE. DEPENDING UPON WHEN AND HOW THE PROPOSAL IS PRESENTED, AND WHAT THE SPECIFIC MANDATE TO THE OBSERVATION TEAM WOULD BE, EMBASSY CONSENSUS IS THAT GOCR COULD EVENTUALLY BECOME INTERESTED IN STATIONING OF OAS OBSERVERS ALONG COSTA RICAN/NICARAGUAN BORDERS. BARRING ANY IMMEDIATE SHARP DETERIORATION IN THE CURRENT SITUATION, HOWEVER, WE WOULD NOT EXPECT CARAZO TO WELCOME IDEA AT THIS TIME.

2. BACKGROUND. DESIRABILITY OF OAS OBSERVERS WAS FLOATED VERY INFORMALLY AND TENTATIVELY BY PRESIDENT ODUBER AND FOREIGN MINISTER

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FACIO AT TIME OF LATOPKUUU LOS CHILES INCIDENT, BUT NEVER PURSUED SERIOUSLY. IT HAS NOT SURFACED AS YET WITH THE CARAZO GOVERNMENT. NEVERTHELESS, NEKDFEARS OF CROSS-BORDER ACTIVITY ORIGINATING IN NICARAGUA HAVE BEEN PRESENT, ESPECIALLY SINCE THE EDEN PASTORA-LED ATTACK ON THE NICARAGUAN CONGRESS. IN EARLY SEPTEMBER, GOCR PUBLIC SECURITY MINISTRY ADVISED US THAT IT WAS IN POASESSION OF INFORMATION THAT SOMOZA PLANNED TO CREATE A SERIES OF BORDER INCIDENTS,

POSSIBLY WITH INTENT OF CREATING A PRETEXT TO PURSUE SANDINISTAS ALLEGEDLY TRAINING NEAR THE BORDER. ALSO, THE WEEK-END PRESS HERE HAS REPORTED INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BEFORE HIS DEATH WITH US MERCENARY MICHAEL ECHANIS IN WHICH HE REVEALED GN PLANS AS REPORTEDLY VETOED BY SOMOZA -- TO CROSS THE BORDER IN AN OPERATION TO DESTROY FSLN "SANCTUARIES".

3. THE PROBLEM. DESPITE THE PERCEPTION OF THE THREAT, THE ACCEPTED INABILITY OF COSTA RICA'S OWN FORCES TO DEFEND AGAINST IT, AND THAT COUNTRY'S TRADITIONAL RELIANCE ON FRIENDLY OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE WHEN FACED WITH THIS KIND OF SITUATION, WE DO NOT EXPECT THE GOCR TO BE ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT TAKING THE OAS OBSERVER ROUTE AT THIS TIME. CARAZO IS SENSITIVE TO SOME CONTINUED DOMESTIC CRITICISM OF HIS ISTHMIAN EFFORTS TOWARD A NICARAGUAN SOLUTION (WHICH MAY COMMENTATORS HAVE INTERPRETED AS A FORM OF INTERVENTION IN FAVOR OF SOMOZA). WE SUSPECT HE WOULD HAVE AMBIVALENT REACTIONS TO A MOVE WHICH MIGHT WELL BE INTERPRETED LOCALLY AS ONE DESIGNED TO SEAL OFF SANDINISTAS FROM NICARAGUA, IF ONLY SYMBOLICALLY THROUGH A TOKEN OAS PRESENCE, RATHER THAN THE GN FROM COSTA RICA. TO GAIN ACCEPTANCE, THE OBSERVER PLAN OBVIOUSLY WOULD HAVE TO BE CLEARLY PRESENTED BOTH TO CARAZO AND, LATER, BY HIM TO THE COSTA RICAN PEOPLE, AS PART OF COSTA RICA'S DEFENSE AGAINST A CLEAR AND IMMEDIATE GN THREAT AND THE OAS MANDATE TO THE OBSERVERS, TO BE ACCEPTABLE TO CARAZO, WOULD HAVE TO BE SIMILARLY CAST. WE DOUBT THAT THE BORDER SITUATION AT THIS MOMENT, CAN BE SO CHARACTERIZED.

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4. IN SHORT, "MACHO" CARAZO, WHOSE POSTURE ON THREATENING SITUATIONS AS WELL AS HIS LOOKS EARN HIM THE SOBRIQUET, IS UNLIKELY TO SUPPORT SUCH AN INITIATIVE WITHOUT SOME INTERVENING DEVZGOIRANT. COSTA RICA, AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT, APPEARS TO BE LESS SUBJECT TO IMMEDIATE INCURSIONS THAN TWO WEEKS AGO, WITH THE GN CURRENTLY FULLY OCCUPIED WITHIN NICARAGUA'S BORDERS.

5. EMBASSY WOULD SEE NO PROBLEM, HOWEVER, IN INFORMALLY AIRING CONCEPT WITH CARAZO ON A CONTINGENCY BASIS, IF NOT FOR IMMEDIATE APPLICATION, SHOULD DEPARTMENT WISH US TO DO SO. IN THAT EVENT, WOULD APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT'S THINKING AS TO WHEN AND HOW SUCH A PROPOSAL MIGHT EVENTUALLY BEST BE PLANTED BEFORE OAS. WE WOULD ASSUME ALSO, IN THE ABSENCE OF A MORE IMMINENT THREAT, THAT NO SUCH EFFORT WOULD BE INITIATED WHILE ANY HOPE FOR SUCCESS OF CA INITIATIVE REMAINS.

6. FINALLY, AS OF LATE 11 SEPTEMBER, MININTERIOR ADVISED US THAT THE BORDER SITUATION IS CALM. THE GOCR CIVIL GUARD PRESENCE ON THE BORDER, REPORTEDLY NUMBERING ONLY SOME 60 MEN, HAS BEEN PATROLLING AT A DISTANCE OF TWO KILOMETERS FROM THE BORDER, PRESUMABLY TO AVOID INCIDENTS. REINFORCEMENTS WILL BE SENT IF AND WHEN NECESSARY, ACCORDING TO THE GUARD'S PUBLIC STATEMENTS. A POSSIBLE "FLOOD" OF

NICARAGUAN REFUGEES ACROSS THE BORDER SEEKING SAFETY APPEARS TO BE
THE MAJOR LOCAL CONCERN AT THE MOMENT.
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